

National Wildlife Federation Gulf Program Strategic Plan

2025-2030



AUGUST 2025



**NATIONAL
WILDLIFE
FEDERATION**

The background of the entire page is an aerial photograph of a coastal region, likely the Gulf of Mexico. It shows a mix of green marshland, blue water, and some developed areas with buildings and roads. The image is slightly faded to allow the text to stand out.

MISSION

The National Wildlife Federation's Gulf Program advances solutions to support healthy waters and sustainable ecosystems for the Gulf's people and wildlife.

GOAL 1

Ensure that the public and local, state, and federal officials are committed to restoration approaches at the scale needed to protect communities and restore and sustain habitat and wildlife across the Gulf and along the Mississippi River.

GOAL 2

Advance comprehensive coastal and watershed restoration and protection plans and their implementation throughout the Gulf and along the Mississippi River.

GOAL 3

Ensure Deepwater Horizon funding and other relevant funding sources go toward high-quality restoration projects and secure diversified public funding to support habitat conservation, wildlife, nature-based solutions, and community resilience.

GOAL 4

Expand and scale use of nature-based solutions at the state and community levels across the Gulf Coast and along the Mississippi River.

GOAL 5

Support the responsible development of climate change mitigation and clean(er) energy solutions in the Gulf region and consider the impacts on wildlife, habitats, and communities.

The decision to update the National Wildlife Federation's Gulf Program Strategic Plan reflects a commitment to adaptive, science-based conservation in a rapidly changing environmental and socio-political context. Since the launch of the 2020–2025 plan, the Gulf region has experienced shifts in the environmental and policy landscape including escalating climate impacts, evolving community priorities, and the need for new funding opportunities that necessitate a recalibration of goals and strategies. This new 2025–2030 plan builds upon the successes and lessons of the previous framework, aligning the program's objectives with current realities and emerging challenges. It provides a clear, actionable roadmap to guide the Gulf Program's efforts in advancing coastal resilience, sustainable water management, robust wildlife populations, and equitable community engagement across the region.

In alignment with the National Wildlife Federation's broader strategic vision, this plan is grounded in three core pillars: Wildlife Recovery and Habitat Conservation, Climate Solutions and Clean Energy, and Environmental Justice and Resilient Communities. These guiding principles shaped every aspect of our planning process and will continue to inform our work over the next five years. The Gulf Program remains steadfast in its mission to protect and restore wildlife, estuaries, wetlands, and other vital wildlife habitats, while also championing clean energy solutions and amplifying the voices of historically marginalized communities every step of the way.

This strategic plan is both a reflection of where we've been and a bold declaration of where we are headed. This plan provides the strategic clarity and direction needed to navigate the challenges ahead and seize the opportunities that will define the next five years.



Gulf Program: Key Accomplishments

Actively participated in state advisory committees to advance **coastal master planning** for restoration and resilience in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, while also fostering strong public engagement, including leading community outreach efforts for the first-ever Florida-based Coastal Master Plan in the Tampa Bay region.

Strategically guided allocation of DWH settlement funds, totaling billions of dollars, to priority Gulf restoration initiatives, ensuring transparency through **public engagement and expert advisory input**. Thousands of acres of restoration are moving forward through projects from Texas to Florida, benefiting a wide range of species from migratory waterfowl to endangered sea turtles to manatees.

Helped secure billions of dollars in government funding to **advance Everglades restoration**, leading federal policy and sportsmen engagement with partners, benefiting wildlife like the Florida Panther, the snail kite, and largemouth bass.

Launched a comprehensive initiative to promote **natural infrastructure solutions** in high-priority regions along the **Mississippi River**, aiming to reduce flooding and nutrient pollution through implementation of nature-based solutions in hotspot areas, vulnerability assessments, strategic land acquisitions, and the development of strong community partnerships.

Collaborated with community partners on local initiatives throughout the Gulf region, including:

- Updating **sea turtle lighting ordinances** in over a dozen municipalities on Florida's Gulf Coast
- Leading community groups to support large-scale restoration efforts, such as multi-billion dollar projects like sediment diversions and the MRGO Ecosystem Restoration, aimed at **protecting Southeast Louisiana from climate impacts** like sea level rise and storm surge
- Supporting **manatee conservation** through habitat restoration, spring restoration efforts, and the development of a manatee sighting network in Florida
- Researching and employing **innovative community outreach methods** for increasing awareness and local engagement on climate change solutions
- **Filling research gaps** to inform decision-making, ultimately keeping a major land-building, naturally-formed river diversion flowing in the lower Mississippi River Delta
- Conducting localized, **place-based climate assessments** in the Upper and Mid-Coast of Texas and the Quad Cities region to support local leaders and decision-makers in advancing climate resilience planning
- Co-developing **nature-based solutions** that reflect local priorities and needs in Refugio County, Texas



Gulf Program History

The Gulf of Mexico is a national treasure, home to some 15,000 species of fish and wildlife, and is also home to more than 65 million people, making it one of the fastest growing regions in the U.S. It is America's energy coast, with more than 45 percent of total U.S. petroleum refining capacity. The productive commercial and recreational fisheries of the Gulf help feed the nation, support local coastal economies, and preserve our sporting heritage. The Gulf region is also a hotspot for climate mitigation efforts, such as carbon sequestration in aquatic and terrestrial habitats, and carbon capture, and alternative energy, like offshore wind and hydrogen. The Gulf's natural resources make this coast as important for people as it is for wildlife, and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) is committed to ensuring that the region's wildlife and communities thrive now and for years to come.

NWF has a long history of advocacy in the Gulf of Mexico region. In 2000, our members and supporters were instrumental in securing Congressional support for a comprehensive plan to restore the Everglades in Florida. Since 2007, NWF has worked collaboratively with other organizations to form the Restore the Mississippi River Delta Coalition in Louisiana and work towards the largest ecosystem restoration effort in the country. For nearly two decades we have worked to ensure that Texas bays have the fresh water they need to support healthy fish and wildlife populations.

When the Deepwater Horizon (DWH) oil rig exploded in the Gulf in 2010, precipitating the largest marine oil spill in U.S. history, NWF marshalled its resources to bring national and international attention to the unfolding ecological catastrophe. In the wake of this disaster, NWF and our state affiliates, together representing millions of sportsmen and outdoor enthusiasts, actively supported the 2012 RESTORE Act, which sent an unprecedented 80 percent of the civil penalties arising from the 2010 oil spill back to the Gulf for restoration and recovery.

Since 2021, NWF has worked along the Mississippi River to advance natural infrastructure solutions for communities and wildlife. Our work entails partnerships with hotspot regions and communities that are experiencing chronic flooding, habitat decline, and poor water quality. Through on-the-ground partnerships, we're advancing conservation practices that will allow communities along the Mississippi River to adapt to climate stressors and thrive.



The Challenge and Opportunity Ahead

The Gulf of Mexico ecosystem was in decline long before the 2010 Deepwater Horizon (DWH) oil spill put the Gulf on the front page of publications around the world. It had been neglected by federal resource agencies and scientific institutions, resulting in a lack of baseline information on species and habitats needed to accurately assess the damage from major hurricanes and the DWH oil spill. Because the Gulf is the chief source of oil and gas for the country, policymakers have long regarded the health of its natural assets as secondary to its role in keeping the nation's energy economy booming.

Hurricane Katrina, subsequent hurricanes, and the DWH oil spill drew attention to the longstanding conservation and restoration needs of the Gulf ecosystem, which supports much of the region's economy but has been overworked and under-protected. In the years since the DWH oil spill, devastating hurricanes and floods have swept the Gulf coast, repeatedly putting the region in the headlines and highlighting the need for more attention from planners and policymakers in the Gulf. It is increasingly clear that we can no longer postpone implementing long-term sustainable solutions to these continuing catastrophic events and the looming threats of climate change if we want to keep the Gulf and its coastal communities functioning and reliable for those who call the region home and for those who benefit from its resources.

Shifting political priorities and reduced federal support have created an environment of declining funding for restoration and protection initiatives. With federal allocations to states being cut and the DWH settlement funds projected to be exhausted by 2032, long-term financial and associated ecological and social sustainability is increasingly uncertain. It is essential to maintain strong public investment in Gulf Coast restoration efforts and to foster community engagement that highlights and addresses critical environmental and social issues. At the same time, there is a growing need to build local capacity and expand local and regional authority to lead planning, funding, and implementation efforts, ensuring that decisions are responsive to place-based needs and grounded in community priorities.

The Gulf Coast is also emerging as a key frontier for clean energy production, including offshore wind. These developments present a significant opportunity to diversify the region's electricity grid and reduce reliance on fossil fuels while also contributing to national climate goals. However, they also introduce new challenges, such as potential impacts on marine ecosystems, fisheries, and coastal communities. Ensuring that clean energy projects are developed responsibly and equitably will require proactive planning, strong environmental safeguards, and meaningful community engagement. It is also critical that these efforts are closely coordinated with ongoing coastal restoration goals to avoid conflicts, maximize

ecological benefits, and ensure that infrastructure development supports, rather than undermines, long-term resilience in the region.

Additionally, close attention must be paid to the potential impacts of federal regulatory reforms affecting key environmental legislation, including the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. These foundational laws are vital to protecting wildlife and habitats in the Gulf Region and to preventing future environmental disasters.

How We Work

NWF's Gulf Program uses a range of approaches to achieve its mission, goals, and objectives. We have helped shape and advocate for large-scale ecosystem restoration efforts based on the best available science and community support. We have taken on tough fights over the protection of rivers and estuaries. We are a major voice for nature-based solutions to flooding, coastal erosion, and other climate impacts. We recognize the role of sportsmen in advocating for habitats and wildlife that are essential to our sporting heritage. We are marshalling support for the protection of coral reefs and other marine resources. We are committed to advancing equity and justice for vulnerable coastal communities in all that we do.

What Makes NWF and the Gulf Program Unique

1. **NWF's Gulf Program focuses on systems change and building processes and capacity for long-term progress** in addition to near-term projects.
2. **NWF's Gulf Program speaks to peoples' minds and hearts** by mobilizing and drawing on high quality science and research and blending our approaches with communications and engagement activities that connect with people emotionally.
3. **NWF's Gulf Program works across multiple levels** – national, regional, state, local, community – enabling us to connect people, resources and ideas across these levels.
4. **NWF's Gulf Program works at different depths** with different stakeholders, doing hands-on work but also supporting the work of others in our coalitions; we can step up and back when needed.
5. **NWF's Gulf Program strategically combines and sequences use of its competencies and approaches** in ways that enhance the effectiveness and impact of our work with partners.
6. **NWF's Gulf Program has a broad network of affiliates and partners** that we can leverage to enhance power and access expertise.



Key NWF Competencies and Approaches



ADVOCACY

Advocate for federal, state and local legislation, policies and practices that advance Gulf Program goals and objectives.



PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITION BUILDING

Work in close partnership with diverse organizations to support advocacy and outreach around important issues.



COMMUNICATIONS, EDUCATION, AND OUTREACH

Inform and engage key stakeholders and the public so that they can participate effectively in decision-making processes related to Gulf restoration and resilience.



SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

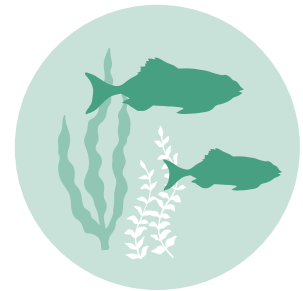
Conduct scientific research and analysis to better define environmental threats and support scientifically robust decisions and actions.

New Directions: Priority Goal Areas for 2025-2030

After 25 years working in the Gulf region, NWF has gained significant experience with the challenges the region faces. Our Gulf Program goals continue to be guided by the north stars expressed in our mission: *advancing solutions to support healthy waters and sustainable ecosystems for the Gulf's **people** and **wildlife***. We have identified five major goals to guide and focus our work over the next five years (2025-2030). We believe these goals are well-designed to meet the moment where efforts stand to support and protect people and wildlife across the Gulf region. These new program goals are well-aligned with the pillars of NWF's 2024-2030 Strategic Plan: Wildlife Recovery and Habitat Restoration, Climate Solutions and Clean Energy, and Environmental Justice and Resilient Communities.

Wildlife Recovery & Habitat Restoration

While the Gulf coast is largely thought of as America's energy coast, the Gulf's coastal and ocean environments are teeming with wildlife. The Gulf's 15,000 species of wildlife include 28 types of dolphins and whales, 49 species of sharks, and five different sea turtles, a tremendous variety of recreationally and commercially pursued fish and 38 species of ducks, geese and swans. A wide variety of habitats support this abundance, such as estuaries, wetlands, barrier islands, oyster beds, and coral reefs. Habitat restoration across the Gulf is the foundation of our program. Policies and projects that restore wetlands, rebuild oyster reefs, protect important habitats from development, and recreate natural patterns of water flow and sediment deposition will help many species. From the Texas-Mexico border to the tip of the Everglades, restoring more natural ecological processes, from freshwater flows to sediment delivery, is the surest way to make lasting improvements in the health of the Gulf. In addition to supporting wildlife, these strategies will enhance the resilience of coastal communities. As the nation's most trusted wildlife organization, NWF will keep the Gulf's fish and wildlife at the forefront of its work in the region. A healthy, restored Gulf of Mexico will support and provide for wildlife and human communities for years to come.



Climate Solutions & Clean Energy

The Gulf region is on the front lines of climate change in the United States. In 2023, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Climate Change Synthesis Report included data showing that seas (including in the Gulf of Mexico) are rising and that rise is expected to continue and even accelerate through this century. But there is a silver lining: some of the worst-case sea level rise (SLR) projections for the next 50 years may be too pessimistic. In other words, though the long-term prospects are worse, over the near term they are somewhat better. This scenario highlights the urgency of taking decisive action over the next few decades to both reduce carbon emissions (thus staving off some of the worst impacts) and mitigate near-term effects through restoration and resilience efforts.



The impacts of a changing climate threaten people, wildlife, and economies in the Gulf. As we advocate for restoration in the Gulf region, NWF is setting the stage for a greater emphasis on ecosystem resilience and innovation in the face of climate change. The myriad benefits associated with the protection and restoration of the region's natural resources — coastal wetlands, mangroves, coral reefs, and seagrasses — are driving new conversations about the human community's reliance on healthy ecosystems to sustain our way of life. In addition to resilience measures that will help communities and wildlife adapt to climate change, NWF is dedicated to advancing solutions that will help keep carbon out of the atmosphere and mitigate climate impact projections.

Environmental Justice & Resilient Communities

With more than 16 million people living in U.S. communities on the Gulf coast, there is a strong connection between the health and resilience of Gulf Coast ecosystems and the well-being of people and communities. NWF is committed to amplifying the voices of marginalized communities to ensure thriving and healthy communities, wildlife, and ecosystems across the Gulf region. As climate change impacts, including more frequent and intense hurricanes, and other environmental stressors affect the Gulf region, NWF is strengthening work to ensure the resilience of coastal communities and the ecosystems they depend on.



The five goals below are designed to ensure the Gulf Program supports these NWF pillars.

GOAL 1

Public and Government Commitment

Ensure that the public and local, state, and federal officials are committed to restoration approaches at the scale needed to protect communities and restore and sustain habitat and wildlife across the Gulf and along the Mississippi River.

Rationale: The Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico are highly vulnerable to climate threats and other environmental stressors, making ecosystem restoration critical to the health and resilience of communities, wildlife, and the economy. From hazardous weather events like drought, extreme rainfall, and stronger and more frequent storms, to more gradual changes like subsidence, sea level rise and warming temperatures, communities are being impacted daily. Given this acute vulnerability, large-scale ecosystem restoration is essential to safeguard the long-term health and resilience of the Gulf region. To advance this restoration, public support and political will must be strong and robust. This requires broad partnerships as well as impactful outreach and communications that elevate the benefits of investing in ecosystem protection for habitats, public health, disaster preparedness, and the overall wellbeing of communities.

CROSS PROGRAM LINKAGES



Texas Coast and Water (TCW)

Program: While the TCW Program and the Gulf Program are distinct initiatives, they share overlapping geographies and strategic alignment around water, habitat, and climate resilience.

Through shared staff capacity, there is natural cross-pollination of ideas and models. The place-based climate vulnerability assessment in the Texas Mid-Coast, led by the TCW Program, served as a model for the Gulf Program's similar work in the Quad Cities region along the Mississippi River. Similarly, early coastal master planning efforts in Louisiana, supported by science-based modeling, project prioritization, and community engagement, offered important lessons that shaped Texas' first Coastal Resiliency Master Plan.

Both programs benefit from shared learning on nature-based solutions: drawing from case studies, identifying best practices, and coordinating on proposal development and advocacy strategies. While not formally integrated, these linkages have led to stronger, more cohesive approaches to advancing climate resilience, habitat restoration, and water security across the Gulf.

Plan of Action: Through strategic communications and outreach, such as storytelling, case studies and pilots, media outreach, and field tours, NWF will make the case for continued support for large-scale restoration and its importance to communities, culture, wildlife, and the economy. We will work through our existing and new partnerships with communities, agencies, and organizations to expand our reach and impact in target areas along the Gulf Coast and Mississippi River. We will work to engage key stakeholders to showcase wide-ranging support and needs for restoration. This work will be rooted in storytelling, connecting people to the environments and wildlife they love through work with iconic species and narratives highlighting cultural connection to place. In addition, we will make the case for natural infrastructure solutions, ecosystem restoration, and disaster preparedness by showcasing successes and compelling data and returns on investment. Our work with key species will augment this evidence, as the health of these species serves as indicators of the health of their ecosystems more broadly. Engaged stakeholders will include civic and business leaders, government officials, faith leaders, landowners, sportsmen, and academia.

Objective 1.1: Grow a strong public and decision-maker understanding of and commitment to nature-based solutions in ecosystem conservation and restoration across the Gulf and along the Mississippi River through innovative and proven outreach and communications methods, showcasing compelling data, success stories, and elevating voices of champions.

Objective 1.2: Build community champions and engage key stakeholders in advocacy for ecosystem restoration plans, projects, and programs.

Objective 1.3: Build local, state, and federal support for large-scale restoration in the Mississippi River Delta, the Everglades, along Florida's Gulf Coast, and along the Mississippi River by engaging key leaders with relevant information and demonstrated stakeholder support.

GOAL 2

Comprehensive Planning

Advance comprehensive coastal and watershed restoration and protection plans and their implementation throughout the Gulf and along the Mississippi River.

Rationale: State and local governments need to be ready to implement projects and programs that are based in the best available science to ensure that funding opportunities will be used strategically to implement suites of projects that work together to better protect communities and protect and restore ecosystems for the long-term while accounting for future climate-change related impacts. Without comprehensive planning that is based on sound science and includes meaningful community engagement throughout the process, investment in restoration funds can be piecemeal and inadequate to address ecosystem stressors and community needs. NWF's Gulf Program has a long history with comprehensive planning efforts in the Gulf, including the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan, and Texas' Coastal Resilience Master Plan. We are also expanding our reach to master planning in Tampa Bay and watershed planning throughout the Gulf and along the Mississippi River.

While science-based, comprehensive planning is critical, planning alone doesn't achieve restoration and protection goals. Plans need public support, funding, and continual advocacy and accountability to ensure implementation and adherence. NWF is committed to advancing plans with advocacy and accountability and countering any politicization of science that distorts real risks to people and wildlife and undermines the foundations for effective policy and investment.

Plan of Action: NWF will advocate for target states to take on comprehensive planning efforts that prioritize using the best available science and focus on ecosystem restoration and other nature-based solutions, while meaningfully engaging communities in the planning process. Our team will participate in planning processes, including technical advisory and working groups for government agencies and estuary programs, and will shape plans that guide the future of project-level investments for the Gulf coast and Mississippi River.

Objective 2.1: Advocate for the use of best available science to guide project planning and decision-making for ecosystem restoration and other nature-based solutions that address ecosystem stressors and community needs.

Objective 2.2: Ensure community members and other key stakeholders are engaged throughout planning processes through accessible community meetings, project solicitation, and opportunities to connect with local and state leadership.

Objective 2.3: Support implementation of ongoing comprehensive planning efforts across the Gulf that produce community-supported and science-based outcomes to ensure a strong process for the 2029 Louisiana Coastal Master Plan, 2028 Texas Coastal Resiliency Master Plan, and the inaugural Tampa Bay Coastal Master Plan.

GOAL 3

Funding

Ensure Deepwater Horizon funding and other relevant funding sources go toward high-quality restoration projects and secure diversified public funding to support habitat conservation, wildlife, nature-based solutions, and community resilience.

Rationale: Deepwater Horizon (DWH) settlement funds are anticipated to remain the primary funding source for ecosystem restoration across the Gulf through 2032. It is imperative these funds be invested in restoration projects that address the scale of the injury and promote the long-term health of Gulf ecosystems. This funding is also coming to an end, mandating the diversification of funding sources for critical Gulf Coast restoration, including implementation of the Louisiana and Texas coastal master plans. In the Everglades, federal support must be sustained for implementation of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, which is urgently needed to address water management for millions of Floridians and hundreds of wildlife species. Along the Mississippi River, communities face chronic flooding and degraded wildlife habitat. Investment in natural infrastructure solutions to reduce flood threats, enhance water quality, and restore habitat are essential to the future of the largest river on the continent.

As sea levels rise, storms continue to get stronger, and rainfall becomes more extreme, coastal and river ecosystems and communities become more vulnerable. Shepherding existing funding sources like Deepwater Horizon, Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act, and GOMESA (energy revenue sharing) toward science-based and community-support projects continues to be a top priority. Securing additional and new funding sources for ongoing and emerging initiatives across the Gulf and along the Mississippi River are necessary to adapt to and mitigate for climate stressors threatening communities, wildlife, and the economy.

Plan of Action: As we pass the 15th anniversary of the DWH disaster, NWF continues to track restoration progress and shine a light on restoration needs and opportunities throughout the Gulf. With approximately \$7.7 billion of \$16.7 billion in DWH restoration funds remaining, we have many lessons learned to reflect upon and major progress to report and build upon. As we move toward the final phase of DWH spending, advocacy for scientifically-sound projects that address the most pressing needs of the system, robust public-input, and transparency are as critical as ever to the recovery of the Gulf. NWF will continue to uphold these principles and hold accountable those who veer away. NWF will continue to assess priority projects and advocate for implementation.

NWF will also continue to lift up funding needs for major restoration initiatives across the Gulf and along the Mississippi River, highlighting positive examples of projects built to date with existing funding, maintaining relationships with key decision-makers and agencies and connecting them to the best available science and key stakeholders. As we approach 2032, NWF will advocate for new federal, state, and local funding for coastal habitat restoration and nature-based solutions that enhance coastal resilience to protect people and wildlife.

Objective 3.1: Working closely with partners across the Gulf region, secure DWH funding for high-impact, regional restoration programs and nature-based projects through sound science, strategic policy, and broad community support.

Objective 3.2: Advocate for and guide the continuation of existing and the identification of new state and federal funding (including pre-disaster investment) to support habitat conservation, wildlife, nature-based solutions, disaster preparedness and community resilience across the Gulf and along the Mississippi River.

Objective 3.3: Explore opportunities to attract or leverage innovative funding (e.g., institutional investors, individual corporations, or the insurance industry) for critical, science-based and community supported ecosystem restoration.

Objective 3.4: Build public and decision-maker support for increased investment in nature-based solutions and habitat restoration by highlighting successful case studies, progress made and the recovery status and habitat needs of focal species in the Gulf of Mexico.

GOAL 4

Advancing Nature-Based Solutions

Expand and scale use of nature-based solutions at the state and community levels across the Gulf Coast and along the Mississippi River.

Rationale: Nature-based solutions (NbS) are win-win, cost-effective strategies that protect communities and ecosystems from climate-driven hazards while delivering multiple benefits, including habitat restoration for wildlife and at-risk species, water quality improvements, and coastal resilience. NWF has a proven track record in advancing use of NbS via advancement of billions of dollars of large-scale restoration projects that protect communities, wildlife, and economic livelihoods in Louisiana. Notable NbS work we have done includes living shoreline workshops with contractors and NbS planning initiatives in Florida, launching an initiative to advance natural infrastructure along the Mississippi River, and influencing policy and funding changes at the state and federal levels. Through this work, NWF found that while adequate funding is essential, the most successful and sustainable NbS projects are integrated into state

CROSS PROGRAM LINKAGES



Natural Infrastructure Center for Environmental Justice and Resilience (NICER): This is a cross-cutting initiative between our programs, our affiliates, and our partners that aims to uplift and build on the Federation's legacy of advancing natural infrastructure while prioritizing the needs of vulnerable communities. The initiative will focus on collaboration with stakeholders and co-develop projects and policies that support community-driven solutions.

The initiative is being piloted alongside the Mississippi River team's efforts to protect and restore the Mississippi River basin while improving the quality of life for all communities.

coastal and hazard mitigation strategies and include effective efforts to build local receptivity to these solutions.

As the Mississippi River and Gulf Coast continue to experience escalating climate impacts, it has become increasingly strategic to deepen engagement at the state and local levels. By embedding NbS directly in state policies and facilitating place-based project implementation at the community level, NWF can leverage its expertise and affiliate network to drive wider adoption, demonstrate tangible benefits, and ensure equitable outcomes, positioning itself as a credible leader in advancing these strategies.

Plan of Action: The Gulf Program will strategically expand the adoption and implementation of nature-based solutions by engaging at both state and community levels in key geographies, including communities from Texas to Florida, and select regions along the Mississippi River. At the state level, we will advocate for the integration of NbS into planning frameworks and policy infrastructure, such as coastal plans, zoning and floodplain ordinances. Locally, we will facilitate project planning and implementation, prioritizing place-based solutions that directly benefit highly vulnerable and underserved communities. NWF will build public understanding and support for NbS, elevating community leadership and educating vulnerable populations about their climate risks and the potential of structural and nonstructural solutions. We will focus on showcasing successful NbS examples, leveraging data and case studies to demonstrate their multiple benefits, and fostering broad-based political support among elected officials. Working through our affiliate network and aligning our efforts with NWF's Natural Infrastructure Center for Environmental Justice and Resilience (NICER), we will strive to amplify our impact and transfer lessons learned across the Gulf.

Objective 4.1: Elevate public understanding and community leadership for nature-based solutions by communicating their multiple benefits (habitat, water quality, coastal resilience) through data-driven case studies and educational initiatives.

Objective 4.2: Educate and build bipartisan local government and decision-maker support and advocate for embedding nature-based solutions in state and local policies.

Objective 4.3: Facilitate community-level NbS project planning and implementation, prioritizing place-based approaches in geographies and communities, particularly historically underserved and vulnerable communities disproportionately impacted by climate change, where NWF's capacity can have the greatest impact.

Objective 4.4: Leverage NWF's affiliate network, existing coalitions, and the NICER framework to strategically expand reach and amplify impact, facilitating knowledge transfer and collaborations across the Gulf region, particularly where direct capacity is limited.

GOAL 5

Advance Climate Solutions

Support the responsible development of climate change mitigation and clean(er) energy solutions in the Gulf region and consider the impacts on wildlife, habitats, and communities.

Rationale: Climate change poses a growing threat to both people and wildlife in the Gulf region. While the Gulf Program has historically focused more on climate adaptation, it is now strategically imperative to expand our efforts into climate mitigation. This pivot is essential to ensure the region contributes to global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while protecting the region's unique wildlife and communities. The Gulf region is America's energy coast, making it both a critical player in the energy economy and is already a hotspot for climate mitigation efforts, including transitions to cleaner energy through offshore wind and hydrogen energy, carbon sequestration in aquatic and terrestrial habitats, and carbon capture. All these climate mitigation strategies can have significant local impacts, both positive and negative. Thus, responsible siting of transmission and clean energy projects, educating and addressing stakeholder concerns, avoidance of project greenwashing, and careful consideration of environmental justice are all key to

CROSS PROGRAM LINKAGES



Offshore Wind Energy Team: The Gulf Program and Offshore Wind Energy teams are committed to responsibly developing offshore wind power in a manner that supports communities and protects marine and coastal wildlife. The Gulf is a vibrant place for wildlife and includes many at-risk species. With additional offshore wind leases expected off the coast, it is imperative that our programs work together to ensure development of much needed renewable energy while ensuring minimal conflicts and strong protections for the Gulf's habitat and marine wildlife.

ensuring that climate solutions avoid, minimize, and mitigate wildlife, habitats, or communities. By connecting climate solutions to places that people love and value, and by empowering communities to engage with these issues, NWF can help foster a just and sustainable energy transition in the Gulf region. Since 2020, NWF's Gulf Program has worked on climate mitigation with other NWF teams, providing regional expertise on offshore wind, carbon sequestration and storage, and blue carbon. We look forward to continuing and expanding this work.

Plan of Action: NWF is positioned as a trusted partner in many Gulf communities. By bridging the gap between climate solution efforts, habitat and wildlife needs, and community well-being, NWF will raise awareness of the need for and shape climate mitigation solutions in the Gulf. NWF will advocate for the responsible development of climate mitigation and clean energy solutions by tracking projects, providing comments, and ensuring robust community input as well as decision-maker support. We will build upon our work to advance responsible offshore wind energy in the Gulf and educate communities on carbon management efforts like carbon capture and sequestration, and hydrogen energy development. NWF will prioritize approaches that minimize adverse impacts on wildlife, habitats, and communities, by championing climate solutions that are effective in reducing carbon emissions but are also socially just and ecologically sound.

Objective 5.1: Advocate for policies and practices that promote the responsible and equitable development of climate mitigation and clean energy solutions in the Gulf, ensuring the protection of wildlife and habitats.

Objective 5.2: Empower communities with knowledge and tools to understand clean energy and climate technology opportunities, and potential project impacts and ways to mitigate risks, highlighting their direct connection to local ecosystems and places.

Objective 5.3: Work with our local affiliates to engage in climate change mitigation and clean energy solutions, working on topics such as siting of alternative energy projects and energy transmission.

Objective 5.4: Collaborate with NWF's Climate and Water teams to ensure issue expertise and leverage resources to ensure effective policy positions and broader reach.



What It Will Take to Implement This Plan

This new 2025-2030 NWF Gulf Program Strategic Plan reflects the need to re-evaluate our previous strategies in a way that is responsive to current realities. We understand that the evolving environmental landscape requires ambitious goals, and this plan is prepared to meet that challenge. However, it will also require a significant scaling of capacity and resources to expand our team, cultivate new and diverse partnerships, and secure increased financial support. These investments are essential to drive the progress envisioned in this plan and to ensure that our efforts are both impactful and sustainable over the long term.

Staffing

The Gulf program's staffing consists of policy, communications, science, and outreach experts. Our primary focus has long been the Mississippi River Delta, but our efforts have more recently expanded in earnest on the Florida Gulf Coast and along the Mississippi River. As we move forward, we are committed to growing our expertise in these expanded locations, bringing lessons learned from our team's strong resilience, natural infrastructure, and partnership-building background to new communities.

Partnerships

The Gulf Program spans Texas to Florida and is directly connected to major rivers like the Mississippi River. In Louisiana, our major partners are part of a joint campaign of the National Wildlife Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, National Audubon Society, and Pontchartrain Conservancy. Our innovative campaign combines forces and makes efficient use of the varied talents and skills each organization brings to the table. We also have dozens of other local partners throughout coastal Louisiana, with pass-through grants to the Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development, Restore or Retreat and Louisiana Wildlife Federation. And we have long-standing partnerships with the City of New Orleans, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, The Nature Conservancy, and dozens of other organizations. Other partnerships throughout the Gulf include Mississippi Wildlife Federation, Florida Wildlife Federation, Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, and several academic institutions and local governments. In Texas, NWF works with key partners through the Texas Living Waters Project, including Sierra Club and Galveston Bay Foundation. Along the Mississippi River, we partner with Arkansas Wildlife Federation, Tennessee Wildlife Federation, and Prairie Rivers Network. NWF's Offshore Wind Team is also working with several national, state, and local organizations in Louisiana and Texas to advocate for and support the responsible development of offshore wind in the Gulf of Mexico. As we move forward, we anticipate forming new partnerships, both formal and informal, to extend and strengthen our reach.

Funding

The Gulf Program has benefited from sustained, generous funding from a number of charitable foundations as well as federal government grants. We owe our achievements thus far to their support and we hope to earn their renewed support as we embark upon implementation of this strategic plan. We believe that the important work we are doing in the Gulf is nationally significant, particularly as climate change puts coastal and riverine ecosystems under unprecedented stress, and we intend to cultivate relationships with new funders and identify other revenue streams.



National Wildlife Federation Gulf Program Strategic Plan-2030

Dedicated to Jessica Koelsch Bibza, 1969-2022

NWF Senior Wildlife Policy Specialist

Champion of NWF's work with manatees, sea turtles, and healthy shorelines